



MARIANNE GRAY
reviews a frightening
chiller drama starring
JAMES CAAN and
KATHY BATES,
based on the
STEPHEN KING novel

MISERY

● IT'S not so often nowadays that we are treated to clean-cut thrillers with no axemen, androids, mutants, psychos and serial killers, where all the scenes are properly lit and normal everyday things happen all around. Like in *Misery*, from a novel by Stephen King with a screenplay by William Goldman.

Best-selling romantic novelist Paul Sheldon, (James Caan) author of the *Misery* Chastain books, has just finished another book in his hideaway in the mountains of Colorado. On his way to deliver it to his agent in New York, his car crashes in the midwinter snow and disappears down the ravine, apparently forever.

By chance Annie Wilkes (Kathy Bates) drives past and manages to crowbar the writer out of his crumpled car. With a heavy blizzard blowing she takes him back to her house. Being a nurse she has the wherewithal to patch up his ghastly injuries.

By the time Sheldon comes round she has discovered who he is. He has yet to discover that saviour is his No. One Fan, a woman so insanely obsessed with the fantasy of *Misery* Chastain and the reality of Paul Sheldon that

she will resort to anything to keep them both dependent on her.

Enough of the plot. Just thinking about the tortuous curves and convolutions of it make my writer's fingers cringe, for what Annie does to Paul and to Paul's manuscripts is enough to chill my blood.

VERDICT

● *Misery* is first class entertainment for all save those with weak hearts. It is well-written, thrilling, elegantly directed by the brilliant Rob (When Harry Met Sally) Reiner and subduedly performed by the generally under-used James Caan. The gutsy, chubby, middle-aged, and Oscar-winning Kathy Bates, packs such a punch in this film that you leave the cinema reeling.

There are also several quirky asides included like Lauren Bacall as the Manhattan literary agent, and the charming relationship between Richard Farnsworth as the local sheriff and Frances Sternhagen as his deputy.

Don't be put off by the title. Any misery you might be feeling will be put sharply into context after seeing this film!

Producer
ANDREW SCHEINMAN

Director
ROB REINER

Screenplay
WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Photography
BARRY SONNENFELD

Music
MARC SHAIMAN

107 Minutes - Certificate 18
(FIRST INDEPENDENT)

Paul Sheldon	.....	JAMES CAAN
Annie Wilkes	.....	KATHY BATES
Buster	.....	ROGER FARNSWORTH
Virginia	.....	FRANCES STERNHAGEN
Marcia Sindell	.....	LAUREN BACALL
Libby	.....	GRAHAM JARVIS
Pete	.....	JERRY POTTER
Anchorman	.....	TOM BRUNELLE
Anchorwoman	.....	JUNE CHRISTOPHER

RATINGS
SCRIPT 9

PERFORMANCES 8
PRODUCTION 8

DIRECTION 8
ENTERTAINMENT VALUE 9

FILM
18

MAY 1991

OSCAR WINNER



"She's nuts, she's huge, she's fascinatingly drawn," says Kathy Bates of her menacing role in *Misery* which has won her an Oscar

KATHY BATES

Making life a

MISERY for

JAMES CAAN

FANS can be unpredictable, as many famous celebrities have discovered, some fatally. Obsessive fan worship is often what stars fear most for an obsessive fan can make their life a living hell. Remember the Clint Eastwood movie, *Play Misty For Me* in which radio dee-jay Clint had nightmare problems with 'fan' Jessica Walter as his homicidal admirer? Now it's the turn of James Caan to suffer agonisingly at the hands of Kathy Bates in a screen translation of Stephen King's novel, "*Misery*". Caan

plays author Paul Sheldon whose fictional heroine, *Misery* Chastain, has bought him fame, but now he wants to kill her off. But he almost gets himself killed in a car accident in the lonely regions of the rugged Colorado Mountains. His life is saved by a nurse, Annie, who turns out to be one of Sheldon's biggest fans.

When she discovers that Sheldon has killed off *Misery* in his latest book, Annie who is nursing the writer, demands he brings *Misery* back to life. What she ultimately does to him as he lays a helpless 'prisoner' in her midst will have you screaming and squirming. It turns into a nightmare for the physically incapacitated author as he lays at the mercy of his mentally disturbed 'number one fan'.

The role of Annie has brought her the Oscar as Best Actress and a Golden Globe award. It was a part she jumped at playing. "She's nuts, she's huge, she's fascinatingly drawn. She's colourful, whacky, off the wall," says Kathy. "It's an actor's dream to play all of those things and try to make it believable."

Director Rob Reiner, who has given us much lighter movies such as *When Harry Met Sally*, *The Princess Bride* and *The Sure Thing* changes genre with *Misery*. "I've never made anyone in an audience

scream before, but it's fun to watch them jump and scream, almost as much as making them laugh," he says.

Misery is his second adaptation of a Stephen King novel. He filmed *Stand By Me* based on the King short story, "The Body". Reiner says he was drawn to King's "*Misery*" because it paralleled many of his own feelings about acting and directing. "It's about a writer who has become very successful writing a certain kind of book and desperately wants to break away from the mould." Doing so however plunges him into a terrifying nightmare.

When it came to choosing an actress for the role of Annie, Reiner and screenwriter William Goldman (they previously collaborated on the screen version of Goldman's "*The Princess Bride*") both agreed that Kathy Bates would be their ideal choice. An accomplished stage actress with notable Broadway success, she has appeared in supporting roles in the movies, *Men Don't Leave*, *Arthur 2*, *Come Back To The Five And Dime Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* (she also appeared in the Broadway stage version); *Straight Time* and *Melanie Rose*.

"Kathy was the only person we ever thought about when we were casting this part," says Reiner.

To give the character of

FILM



Annie the troubled background that would explain her highly disturbing behaviour, Goldman and Reiner conducted a lot of research. "We looked at tapes of Janine Jones, a nurse who murdered children in the hospital. We watched tapes of serial killer Ted Bundy and of Diane Downs, the woman who killed her children. These people had a common thread, which was that they all seemed normal and regular in conversation. We wanted to make Annie that same kind of person," says Reiner.

Kathy Bates did her own research into the psychology of the sociopath by reading biographies of infamous criminals with sociopathic behaviours. She notes, "What intrigued me was that they (sociopaths) are so normal, and they're often those people that on the news you'll hear a neighbour say, 'I was so surprised when he killed all those people . . . he's not like that at all!'"

Kathy also observes, "We decided it wasn't so much how Annie behaved, because she doesn't act crazy, it's just that the things she *does* are crazy. It's always been very important to Rob and me that Annie has her own sense of logic, that she behaves in a way that suits the way she thinks things should be done."

James Caan, an actor who

has been in and out of favour with Hollywood moviemakers for years, felt this could be his biggest box-office hit for years when he read the script, realising that the role of writer Paul Sheldon had great limitations.

"First of all, for me to sit totally still is impossible and Rob (Reiner) knows this. I have all these legs and arm casts so I'm pretty much immobile and we're shooting in a small place," notes Caan.

"He's perfect," says Reiner, "because he is so physical, and the fact that he was constrained to a bed and a wheelchair almost the entire film made it so frustrating for him that it came out in his performance, which was perfect for his role."

To build the tension slowly, and meticulously, Reiner decided to shoot all the interior scenes in sequence, unlike so many movies. He felt this would help Kathy and Caan to develop the odd relationship between the captor (Annie) and the captured (Paul) letting the story draw out the appropriate feelings he wanted for them.

Annie Wilkes as played by Kathy Bates must be one of the most frightening and dangerous women we've seen on screen for years, and Kathy Bates couldn't be more delighted.

Marianne Gray reviews *Misery* on Page 18.

P.W.